

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L NEW DELHI 9777

EO 11652: GDS
TAGS: OVIP, (CHRISTOPHER, WARREN)
SUBJ: BRIEFING PAPERS FOR DEPUTY SECRETARY' VISIT

REF: STATE 157966

1. IN RESPONSE TO REFTEL EMBASSY SUBMITS BRIEFING
PAPER ON ATAL BIHARI VAJPAYEE, MINISTER OF EXTERNAL
AFFAIRS.

2. FOR MANY YEARS ATAL BIHARI VAJPAYEE WAS THE FOREIGN
POLICY SPOKESMAN IN PARLIAMENT FOR THE JANA SANGH, A
HINDU NATIONALIST OPPOSITION PARTY WHICH TOOK A HARD
LINE TOWARD PAKISTAN, CALLED FOR NUCLEAR WEAPONS, AND
HAD MISGIVINGS ABOUT INDIA'S CLOSE RELATIONS WITH THE
SOVIET UNION AND THE ARAB WORLD. HOWEVER, SOON AFTER
GETTING OUT OF JAIL, WINNING A PARLIAMENT SEAT FROM
NEW DELHI, AND BECOMING FOREIGN MINISTER, VAJPAYEE
REMARKED TO THE PRESS THAT HE WAS "NO LONGER IN THE
OPPOSITION," MEANING THAT THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF
OFFICE HAD LED HIM TO MODIFY HIS VIEWS. SINCE THEN
HE HAS SUPPORTED THE GOVERNMENT'S OPPOSITION TO NUCLEAR
WEAPONS, ADVOCATED ACCOMMODATION WITH PAKISTAN, AND
SOUGHT TO MAINTAIN INDIA'S RELATIONS WITH THE USSR.
BY ALL ACCOUNTS VAJPAYEE IS A HIGHLY CAPABLE AND
KNOWLEDGEABLE MINISTER AND HIS PERFORMANCE HAS EARNED
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HIM THE REPUTATION OF BEING ONE OF THE MOST COMPETENT
MEMBERS OF THE CABINET. IN PARLIAMENT HE ADDRESSES
TOUGH FOREIGN POLICY ISSUES WITH EASE, SELF-ASSURANCE
AND A THOROUGH GRASP OF HIS SUBJECT. HE IS HIGHLY
REGARDED BY THE SENIOR FOREIGN SERVICE PROFESSIONALS
IN HIS MINISTRY. PARTICULARLY IN PUBLIC DEBATE IN
HINDI, VAJPAYEE IS A BRILLIANT, ARTICULATE AND WITTY

GOI SPOKESMAN. THE EMBASSY HAS FOUND, HOWEVER, THAT IN PRIVATE OFFICIAL CONVERSATIONS VAJPAYEE TENDS TO BE RESERVED AND NON-COMMITTAL. WHILE HIS ENGLISH IS GOOD, HIS SUPERIOR HINDI MAY MAKE HIM FEEL LESS ADEQUATE IN WHAT FOR HIM IS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE. FURTHERMORE, HIS STRONGY NATIONALIST VIEWS AND THE QUESTIONS HE HAS HAD IN THE PAST ABOUT SUCH US POLICIES AS MILITARY ASSISTANCE FOR PAKISTAN MAY MAKE HIM CAUTIOUS AND NON-COMMITTAL ABOUT US-INDIA RELATIONS. IN ANY EVENT, IN OUR INITIAL MEETINGS WITH HIM, WE HAVE FOUND HIM LESS WARM AND LESS CLEARLY COMMITTED THAN THE PRIME MINISTER TO IMPROVING US-INDIA RELATIONS.

3. THE 51-YEAR OLD FOREIGN MINISTER WAS BORN IN GWALIOR IN CENTRAL INDIA AND SPENT HIS EARY CAREER IN JOURNALISM. A BACHELOR, HE WAS IN HIS YOUTH A MEMBER OF THE RSS (RASHTRIYA SWAYAMSEVAK SANGH), A SEMI-MILITARY, HINDU-ORIENTED SERVICE ORGANIZATION. LATER, HE WAS A FOUNDING MEMBER OF ITS OFF-SPRING, THE JANA SANGH, A HINDU NTIONALIST PARTY, EVENTUALLY BECOMING ITS PRESIDENT IN 1968-72. DURING THE YEARS SINCE HIS FIRST ELECTION TO PARLIAMENT IN 1957, VAJJPAYEE BECAME PERHAPS THE MOST PROMINENT JANA SANGH LEADER OF ALL-INDIA STATURE AS WELL AS THE PARTY'S SPOKESMAN ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS. IMPRISONED DURING THE EMERGENCY, HE CONTESTED AND WON THE PRESTIGIOUS NEW DELHI CON-

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STTUENCY IN THE MARCH LOK SABHA ELECTIONS.

4. IN 1960 VAJPAYEE WAS A LEADER GRANTEE, SPENDING TWO MONTHS IN THE US OBSERVING THE PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN. SINCE BECOMING FOREIGN MINISTER IN LATE MARCH, HE HAS REPRESENTED INDIA AT THE CIEC MINISTERIAL IN PARIS, WHERE HE MET WITH SECRETARY VANCE, AND ACCOMPANIED PRIME MINISTER DESAI TO THE LONDON COMMONWEALTH CONFERENCE. HE MADE AN OFFICIAL VISIT TO NEPAL IN MID-JULY.

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